

Wheeler Block  
402 Monroe St. and 109-111 St. Clair St.  
Toledo  
Lucas County  
Ohio

HABS No. OH-2255

HABS  
OHIO,  
48-TOLED,  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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OHIO,  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. OH-2255

WHEELER BLOCK

Location: 402-408 Monroe Street and 109-111 N. St. Clair Street, Toledo, Lucas, Ohio

Present Owner: Toledo-Lucas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc.

Present Occupant: L. G. Wasserstrom & Co., Inc.

Present Use: Salesroom, offices and warehouse for Wasserstrom Co. (Future use within convention center site to be determined.)

Significance: The Wheeler Block is a significant example of the late 19th century commercial classicism found in Toledo architecture. Notable architectural elements include the curved corner and open cast iron-flanked entry, the Renaissance windows on the third floor and the use of classical ornamentation. The building possesses a high degree of architectural integrity, highlighted by its yellow brickwork and flowing, sculptural character. The 1973 publication, Look Again, notes the Wheeler Block as "a worthy successor and companion to the earlier commercial district stores surviving along St. Clair Street." Its immediate predecessor and the building's namesake, The Wheeler Opera House which stood on this site for over 20 years, also was noted for its architectural beauty and rounded corner.

The Wheeler Block is also important as the address of several historic and established Toledo businesses, including the L. Haas and Co., the George Gradwohl Store, L. G. Wasserstrom Co., and the Toledo Hosiery and Underwear Company.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1896
2. Architect: Not Known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Chain of Title references from the Lucas County Auditor
  - a. Transfer of Title for 402-404 Monroe Street (Lot 45 and the SE 41.28 and SW 80 feet of Lot 46), Port Lawrence Division

1895 December 2 - Transfer to H. B. and H. Waite  
1897 January 29 - Transfer to L. W. Wackenhimer

- 1921 November ? - Transfer to Helen Wackenhimer (1/2), Zorah Wheeler Swartzbauth (1/6), Lyman Wheeler (1/6) and Jeffery Wheeler Whitehill (1/6) - by Affidavit and 3 Deeds, p. 707.
- 1937 April 21 - Transfer to People's Savings Association - by Sheriff Deed, p. 369.
- 1944 July 27 - Transfer to Louis Wasserstrom & Co., Inc., p. 192.
- 1984 May 4 - Transfer to Toledo-Lucas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc.

- b. Transfer of Title for 406-408 Monroe Street (Lot 45 and NW 38.72, SE 80 feet and SW 80 feet of Lot 46)

- Pre 1913 - Transfer to The Wm. Coghlin Co.
- 1925 July 25 - Transfer to Daisy M. Coghlin, p. 479
  - 1935 May 16 - Transfer to People's Savings Association
  - 1944 July 27 - Transfer to Louis Wasserstrom and Co., Inc., p. 192.
  - 1984 May 4 - Transfer to Toledo-Lucas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc.

- c. Transfer of Title for 109-111 St. Clair Street (Lots 45 and 46 NE 40 feet - apparently split from rest of Lots 45 and 46 in 1905).

- 1905 March 2 - Transfer to Ellen A. Mitchell
- 1907 March 13 - Transfer to Jay C. Lockwood
- 1916 April 16 - Transfer to Coghlin Machinery and Supply Company
- 1916 December 11 - Transfer to William Coghlin and James A. Kirkby (Wm. Coghlin Co.)
- 1925 July 25 - Transfer to Daisy M. Coghlin, p. 479
- 1935 May 16 - Transfer to People's Savings Association, p. 328
- 1945 September 25 - Transfer to Anne Beehler, p. 299
- 1946 September 3 - Transfer to Ruth Frankel, p. 330
- 1983 December 22 - Transfer to Toledo-Lucas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc.

- 4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not Known.
- 5. Original plans and construction: Original plans or drawings not known to exist; upper two stories of Monroe and St. Clair Streets elevations are original in configuration, fenestration and detail.
- 6. Alterations and additions: Generally the first floor store fronts and interiors have been heavily altered. Known alterations occurred at 402-404 Monroe Street in 1937 when builder August J. Bode remodeled the storefronts for \$1,000, and at 408 Monroe Street in 1919 when a \$300 change was made to its storefront by builder Otto Kirchenbauer. Major

alterations were constituted at 109-111 St. Clair Street in 1937 when a \$3,000 permit was taken out for interior warehouse changes.

- B. Historical Context: The Wheeler Block was built in 1896 on the site of the former Wheeler Opera House, which stood on this corner from 1872 to 1893 (it burned in a long-remembered fire on March 17, 1893). The tremendous popularity of the opera house led the owners and builders of the current Wheeler Block to not only name the new building for the former Wheeler Opera House, but to imitate the design of the original structure as well - i.e. rounded corner, angled recessed corner entrance, height, ornamentation and name at top of the rounded corner. The new building, however, was strictly a commercial and warehouse venture, as by the turn-of-the-century the surrounding area was primarily a wholesale/commercial section.

At first, the building was divided into several store fronts along Monroe and St. Clair Streets. The earliest occupants included L. Haas and Co., wholesale wines and liquors, who traded from 402 Monroe and 101-105 St. Clair for 18 years from 1897 to 1915; and The Gilbert Shoe Co. (later Gilbert and Potter) who occupied 404 Monroe for 16 years from 1898 to 1914. 406 Monroe served a succession of restaurants for over 20 years until about 1930, while 408 Monroe was the meat market of George J. Gradwohl also for over 20 years, from about 1908 to 1930. George Gradwohl founded his wholesale meat and poultry business in the 1890's and continued until 1945 - nearly half of this time was spent at 408 Monroe Street. The upper floors of 406-408 Monroe listed as "furnished rooms" or as Clark's Hotel from 1915 through 1930. Other businesses along Monroe and St. Clair Streets included fruits, clothing, novelty, confectionary, and furniture stores as well as pawn brokers by the 1930's. Several stores are listed as vacant during the depression and war years in the 1930's and 1940's.

The arrival of the Louis Wasserstrom Co. at 402 Monroe Street in 1938 heralded the future of most of the entire building. The Wasserstrom Co., founded in 1916 as a tailor's supply house, expended after its 1938 move to the Wheeler Block, so that by 1945 the company encompassed all of the Monroe Street side and most of the St. Clair Street portion. In the same year, 1938, the Toledo Hosiery and Underwear Co., a wholesale distributor of Hanes, National and other undergarments that had been incorporated in 1937 by the Frankel family, moved to 109-111 St. Clair Street, where they remained until early 1984.

The 109-111 St. Clair Street section appears to have been officially split from the same ownership in 1905 and shortly thereafter was taken over by the Coghlin and later Kirkby Machinery and Supply companies which remained here until the late 1920's. The next listed business is Toledo Hosiery and Underwear in 1938.

Both the Toledo Hosiery and Underwear and Wasserstrom companies remain in business, although only Wasserstrom remains at the Wheeler Block location - a situation soon to be changed as the building is taken for use by the convention center. Both companies occupied the Wheeler Block for nearly 50 years.

The Wheeler Block was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 29, 1975.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Wheeler Block is a three story brick commercial structure located on a corner setting. The two street facades are yellow brick which flow into each other via a sweeping, rounded corner. The building is heavily classical and Romanesque in overall styling and is dominated by its third story arches and rounded corner. The interior is utilitarian in design and consists of a labyrinth of storage areas and passageways.
2. Condition of fabric: The overall condition is good, and the building structurally sound. Brick is in generally good repair, with repointing needed in some areas. The biggest problem is deterioration of tin cornices and ornament and window frames on the exterior. The interior suffers from heavy use and soiling, but is generally in sound condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The entire structure is 42 feet high. The Monroe Street facade is approximately 75 feet, while the St. Clair facade is about 135 feet long. The floors are each 16 feet high and the depth is 75 feet.
2. Foundations: The facade and side foundations are mostly rough hewn stone, with some smooth-cut blocks along the Monroe and St. Clair Street sections (perhaps from the Wheeler Opera House). Interior basement divisions are brick. The corner intersection is rounded.
3. Walls: The walls are entirely brick, both interior and exterior - hard fired on the exterior and common red brick (generally exposed) on the interior. The upper level walls are supported by brick piers and cast iron columns with ionic capitals on the first floor. Quoin-like protrusions are found at the ends of the walls and as definers or central recessed (slightly) areas on the upper floors. The walls are unadorned except for rectangular terra-cotta moldings beneath the third floor round arched windows - moldings have egg and dart motif on inner face; and for a series of tin floral oculi which are found below the

cornice. The building is divided into five large bays or 26 sub-bays - 10 bays face Monroe Street, 15 face St. Clair Street and one bay is angled, facing the corner. An early metal fire escape is found on the second and third floors at the west end of the Monroe Street facade, and the exterior wall of 111 St. Clair Street is "gunnite" covered.

4. Structural system, framing: The brick walls are load bearing on both interior and exterior, as are metal and wooden posts on the interior. The framing is of wood. Tie rods help support the section at 109-111 St. Clair Street.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Metal grooved stoops are found at the several entrances along Monroe at St. Clair. The stoop for 109-111 St. Clair Street is composed of blue and brown-tone, small clay tiles in octagonal and square shapes in a geometric mosaic pattern.
6. Chimneys: Evidence of seven chimneys are found on the roof - one midway along the St. Clair facade, three at the top of the wall dividing 107 from 109 St. Clair, one atop the central wall between 404 and 406 Monroe and two atop the wall dividing the Wheeler Block from the adjacent Swiss Hall. All are multiple flue; some flues are evident as protrusions on the facade.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors:
    1. Monroe Street: A single entry door leads to 404 Monroe Street, with an airconditioner in transom above. A wood-sealed door between 406 and 408 once led to upper hotel/flat rooms, while a large hinged double door, garage-type opening now leads to 408 Monroe.
    2. St. Clair: A large door (hinged, single) leads to 107 St. Clair; recessed double-doors, glass and panelled, lead to 109-111 St. Clair and feature a glazed transom above and a stamped tin ceiling at top of recessed area.
    3. Corner: The angled corner features a large single-hinged, glazed entrance door which is deeply recessed. The recess is flanked by four cast-iron columns, two rounded and two squared, and has stamped tin work on its ceiling.
    4. Rear: At the rear of 109-111 St. Clair Street is found a series of four metal double-shuttered doors, one of which is double-door in size.

b. Windows and shutters:

1. Monroe Street: First floor are new showcases and transom type divided by metal and wood joints at 402-406 Monroe. Upper level windows are flat-topped, double-hung, except for four third floor windows which feature large arched openings with double-arch windows inset in the Renaissance tradition. Oculus and triangular openings top each of these four windows. Stone lug sills are on each level.
2. St. Clair: First floor features mostly showcase type with large transoms above. 101-103 are open and have rounded muntins while 105-107 are enclosed with board and batten siding. Cast iron columns divide the 103-107 storefronts. The upper level windows are all flat-topped, double-hung, except for the central section of six bays which feature the round-arched fenestration found also on the third floor Monroe Street facade. Lug sills again are found.
3. Corner: The corner has angled single-pane showcase windows, topped by leaded and bevelled glass transoms at the entrance and double-hung, flat-topped windows above.
4. Rear: The rear elevation, at the back of 109-111 St. Clair is six bays wide on each floor and has double sets of metal shutters covering all the windows on upper two floors.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roofs are flat, sloping away from the facades and are composition in type covered by rolled tar paper.
- b. Cornice, eaves: An elaborate tin cornice runs near the top of the Monroe and St. Clair facades, and is in the form of a classical entablature with egg and dart and dentil moldings below acanthus leaf medallions under the wide eave soffit. A smaller tin cornice also with egg and dart and dentil moldings, separates the first from the second floor in the facades. Another band of molded tin acts as the bed molding of the entablature above the third floor windows.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: A brick parapet, topped by a band of upright stretchers and a band of tin egg and dart molding surmounts the Monroe and St. Clair facades. An elevator headhouse is found at the rear of

the 402-404 Monroe and the 109-111 St. Clair sections. A former large open area, once a skylight which rose up at the rear of 406-408 Monroe, has been covered over with tar paper.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Divided into several sections by brick walls, i.e. 402-404 and 406-408 Monroe Street and 109-111 St. Clair Street; generally open from front to back. Below grade openings, which formerly existed along both Monroe and St. Clair Streets have been blocked in.
- b. First floor: Divided into sections by metal columns between 402-404 Monroe and 109-111 St. Clair and by brick walls between 404, 406 and 408 Monroe and 107 and 109 St. Clair. Rear section of 402-404 Monroe has a storage loft, with shelves and shipping area below, a toilet room and the stairway to the second floor (only stair up); 402-404 serves as the showroom and sales area. 406 Monroe is the office area and has two office partition sections toward the rear and a toilet room. 408 Monroe and 107 and 109-111 St. Clair are basically open warehouse areas from the front to the rear; 408 Monroe and 107 St. Clair connect with each other at the rear intersection. The open-grate elevator is found toward the rear of 107 St. Clair.
- c. Second Floor: Divided into storage sections as well - a newer fire-block wall between cast-iron columns separates 402 from 404, a solid brick wall separates 404 from 406, while the 406-408 section is open, but divided by a central line of cast-iron columns. At the rear of this section is a wall with several original formerly exterior window openings which now open onto a storage area beneath the former large skylight. Access to the 109-111 St. Clair section was not gained, but the space is designated as a warehouse and likely open from front to rear, and divided by a central row of cast-iron columns as are the other spaces. The 107 St. Clair section acts as a passageway to the elevator and the Monroe Street portions.
- d. Third floor: Also an open storage area and nearly a duplicate in configuration to the second floor. A newer plaster/lathe wall between wooden posts divides the 402-404 section. A solid brick wall divides 404 and 406, while the 406-408 portion is open with a row of wooden posts down the center. The same enclosed skylight storage area is found at the rear of 406-408



as on the second floor. Also as on the second floor the 107 St. Clair section serves as a passageway to the elevator and to the 402-404 and 406-408 Monroe Street sections.

2. Stairways: There is only one interior stairway which leads to all upper floors; it is located at the rear of 402-404 Monroe. Remnants of a stair in an enclosed stairwell are found along the wall separating 406 from 408 Monroe with entrance from the exterior only - this stair has been removed on the upper floors, as have all of the other stairways which served the individual stores on all floors. Single stairs descend to the basement.
3. Flooring: Flooring is exposed wooden tongue-in-groove boards throughout - maple on the first floor, pine on the upper floors and of varying widths. Some areas, notably the office on the first floor, have been covered with linoleum. Pine boards on upper floors tend to be wide. A poured concrete floor is found in the basement.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are a mix of plastered and natural brick surfaces. Generally, the first floor walls are plastered and the ceilings covered with beaded, tongue-in-groove wood slats. A tin ceiling is found on the front and mid-sections of 408 Monroe, and is stamped into sections of geometric squares.

An axle with the remains of six wooden wheels/pulleys and an iron track with a metal hook are also found on the ceiling of 408 Monroe. The office section at 406 is also tin in floral designs. Evidence of removed walls is found at the rear of 404-408 Monroe particularly. The wall dividing 107 from 109 St. Clair is natural brick on all three floors, except at the rear of 408 (plastered) and facing 109 (covered with a wallboard). All basement walls are natural stone/brick with open joists, many of which are fire-charred in the 402-404 section.

Upper level walls are also a mix of plastered and natural brick. The St. Clair facing wall is natural painted and bare brick, while the Monroe facing wall is plastered, as is the wall between 404 and 406 Monroe. Newer walls divide 402 and 404 on both floors, as described in Part II, Section C, numbers 1c and 1d. Ceilings are open joists in the 402-404 section, except for approximately 15 to 18 feet of grooved wood slats along Monroe Street. The other ceilings are lathed and plastered.

5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Former passageways to basement sections have been infilled, as have any openings in

the wall between 107 and 109 St. Clair. Interior doors are few and the result of later remodelings, an early paneled double door leads from the rear of 402 Monroe to 107 St. Clair.

Doorways are the dominant points of access and are found throughout the top three floors, and consist merely of generally wide openings in the walls between 402 and 404 and between the Wheeler Block and Swiss Hall abutting walls (one on each floor). A smaller, round arched doorway and a wooden door leads from 404 to 406 Monroe on the first floor. Access to the Swiss Hall at 410-412 Monroe Street can only be gained from inside the Wheeler Block now.

- b. Windows: The only interior windows are those at the rear of 406-408 Monroe on the 2nd (four windows) and 3rd (six windows) floor, which formerly overlooked the open and then skylight-enclosed storage area at the rear; these are flat-topped, double-hung like their counterparts on the exterior. The round-arched windows on the third floor create an impressive interior space.
- 6. Decorative features and trim: The first floor portions of 402-406 Monroe retain much of their original wooden trim around and under windows and doors, most of which is simple ovulo or double-ovulo molding. Wainscoting and wide baseboards are found below the showcase windows. The cast iron columns feature modified doric capitals on the first and second floors. Upper floor windows are simple frames, set directly into the window openings, with no molding or trim. A simple baseboard is found on the second floor of 406-408 Monroe, as are plain moldings around the Monroe Street facing windows.
- 7. Hardware: Little hardware is evident; the door pull and plate of the corner entrance door at 402 Monroe are simple brass designs. Most upper level windows have no pulls or latches - there are functional latches, however on windows facing Monroe Street in the 406-408 section. Utilitarian knobs are found on the older doors in the first floor section of 402-404 Monroe.
- 8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, airconditioning, ventilation: Only the showroom and office areas (402-404 Monroe) and 408 (1st floor) are heated or cooled. Ceiling hung space heaters provide heat, two window unit airconditioners provide cooling and newer overhead fans provide air movement in winter and summer. An overhead heater is also found at the rear of 408 Monroe.

The remaining areas are not heated or cooled, and make use of natural convection, via open doors and windows, for ventilation.

- b. Lighting: Older hanging fluorescent fixtures are found in the showroom and office areas, while all remaining lights are bare incandescent bulbs along newer single conduit. No lighting at all is found on the upper floors above 402-404 now, although evidence of an early, separate two-wire system is found here on the second floor, and in the basement as well. Electrical boxes are generally found in the basement areas.
- c. Plumbing: Little plumbing is evident, as only two toilets/washrooms serve the building, and both are on the first floor as mentioned earlier. Fixtures and piping are merely functional, with simple porcelain wash basins and stools.
- d. Elevator: An open-grate elevator is found at the rear juncture of 408 Monroe Street and 107 St. Clair Street. It is functional by design and for freight use - the works are in the headhouse on the roof.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The Wheeler Block faces southwesterly along Monroe Street and southeasterly along St. Clair Street. It sits on a prominent corner location at the intersection of two major CBD thoroughfares, one of which, Monroe Street, is designated as U. S. Route 223. The Wheeler Block abuts the Swiss Hall (410-412 Monroe Street) on the west and adjoins a parking lot on the north and at the rear of 109-111 St. Clair. The block stands in an area that was once primarily a commercial/wholesale area lined with three to five story buildings, many of which have now been demolished for parking lots, so that the Wheeler Block stands out in this section of the city. The Wheeler Block is two blocks west of the Maumee River at the southern edge of the business district bordering the warehouse district.
- 2. Historic landscape design: None.
- 3. Outbuildings: None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: Not Known.
- B. Early Views: Picture File-Streets-St. Clair (at Monroe) and Rundell Scrapbook, p. 47; Local History and Genealogy Department, Toledo-Lucas County Public Library

C. Interviews: Dave Thielman, Wasserstrom Co., August, 1984  
(several interviews).

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

- a. Real Estate Transfer Records, Lucas County Auditor.
- b. Building Permit Records, Division of Inspection, City of Toledo.

2. Secondary and published sources:

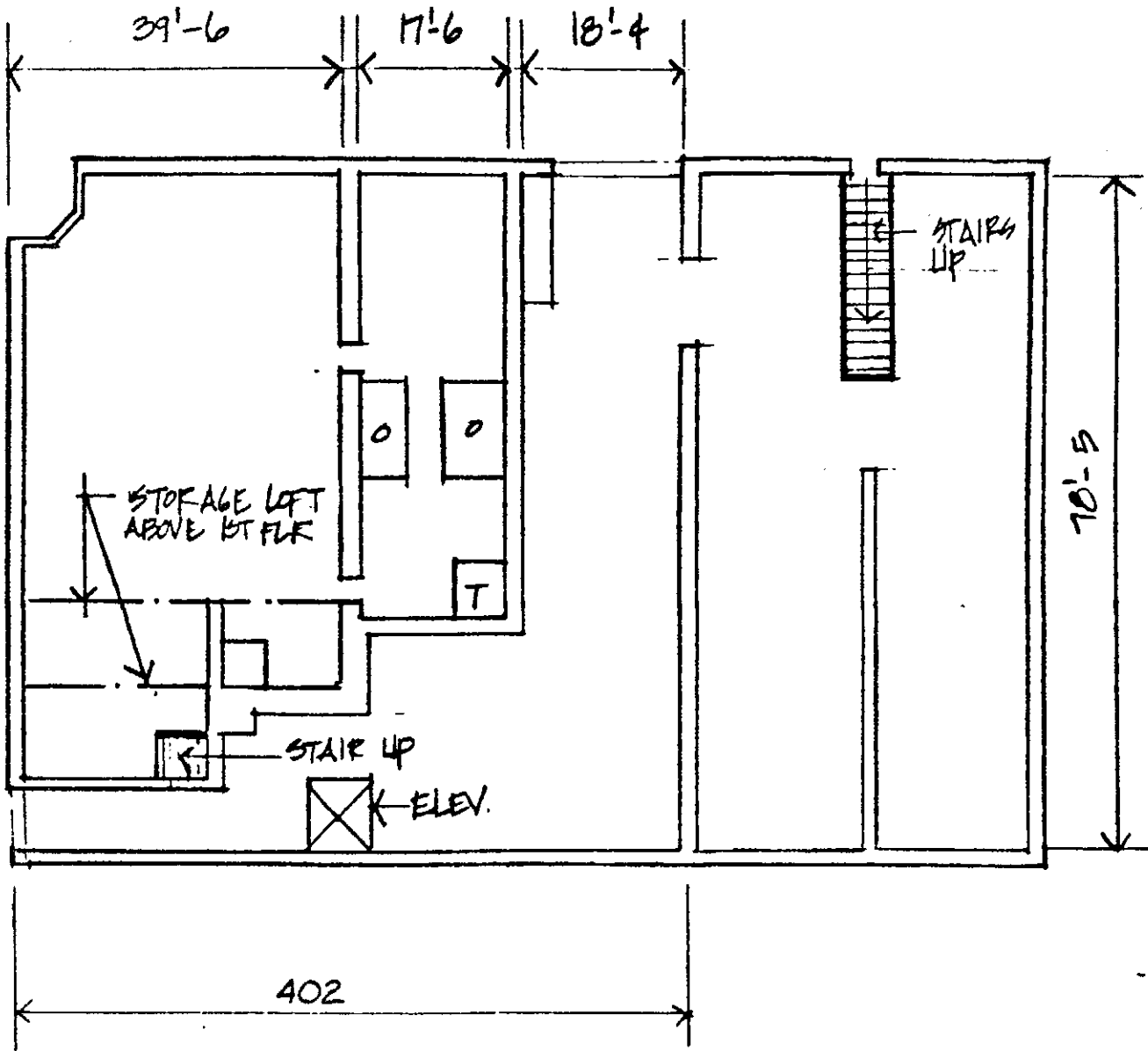
- a. Toledo City Directories, 1895 - Present.
- b. Toledo History Scrapbook: Theaters - Wheeler Opera House; Local History and Genealogy Department, Toledo-Lucas County Public Library.
- c. Ohio Historic Inventory Form - 402 Monroe Street, Cynthia Barclay, Landmarks Committee, 1981.
- d. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form - Wheeler Block, Eric Johannesen, Landmarks Committee, 1970.
- e. Look Again: Landmark Architecture in Downtown Toledo and Old West End; Johannesen, Eric and Dickes, Allen, Landmarks Committee, 1973.
- f. Toledo Times, July 10, 1945.
- g. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Sanborn Fire Insurance Co., 1905 (corrected through 1932).

E. Supplemental Material:

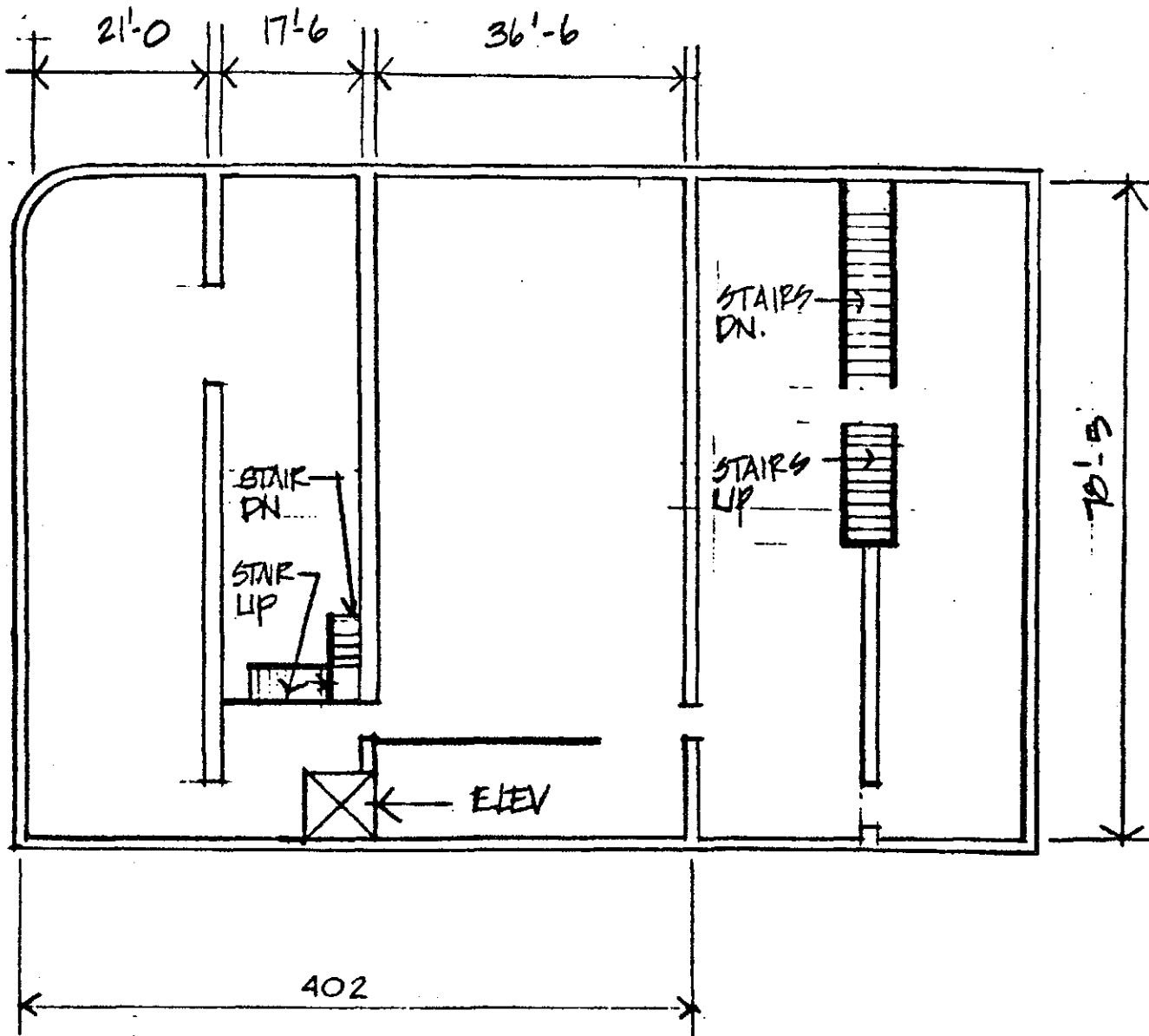
- 1. Photographs and floor plan sketches supplied by the Toledo-Lucas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc.
- 2. Slides taken by preparer of documentation.

Prepared by: Ted J. Ligibel  
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July - September, 1984

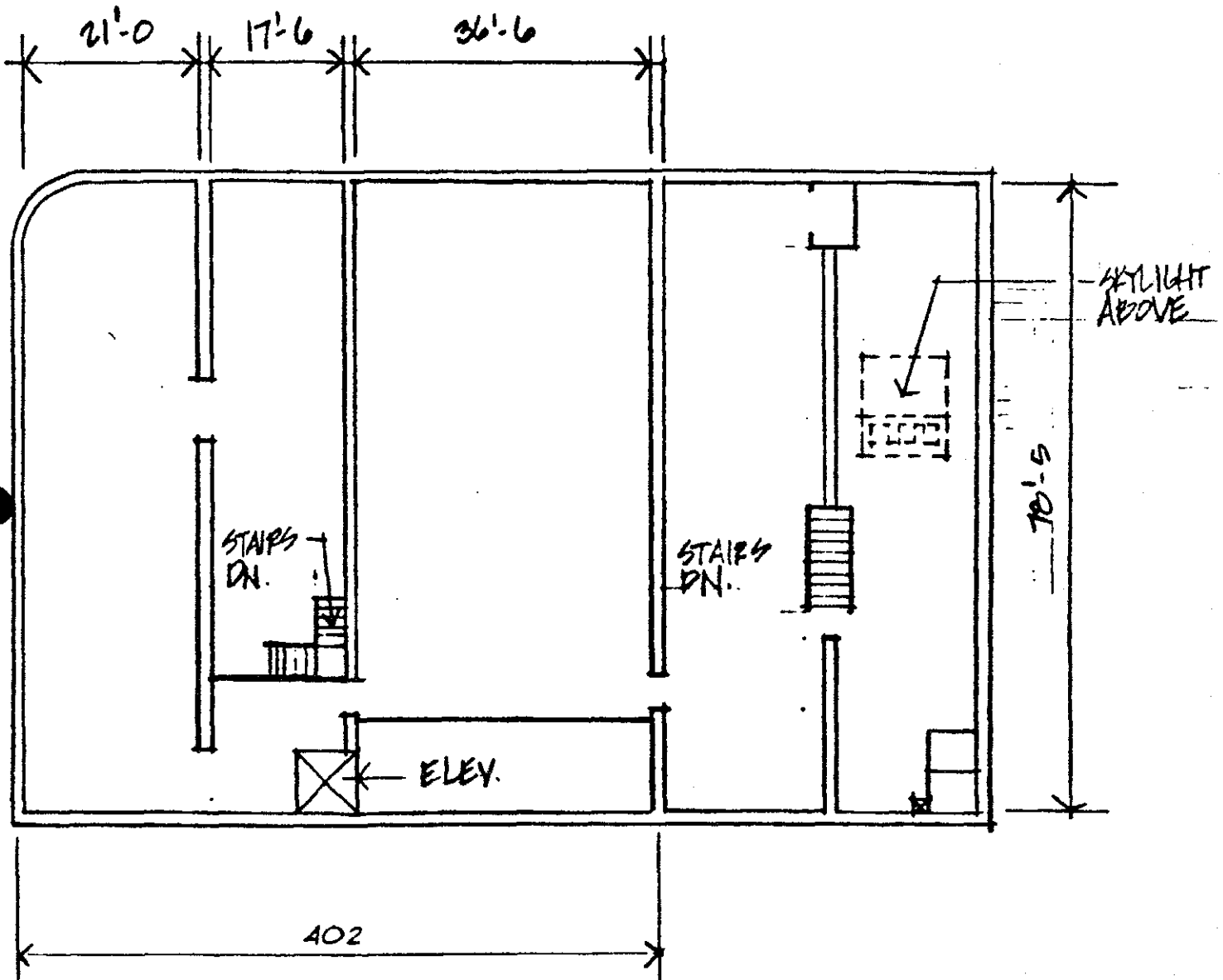
402-408 Monroe Street - First Floor



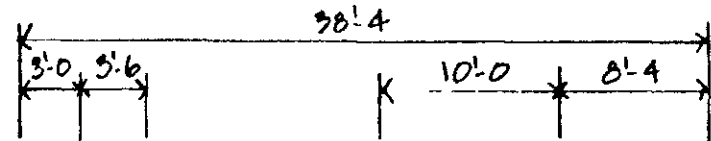
402-408 Monroe Street - Second Floor



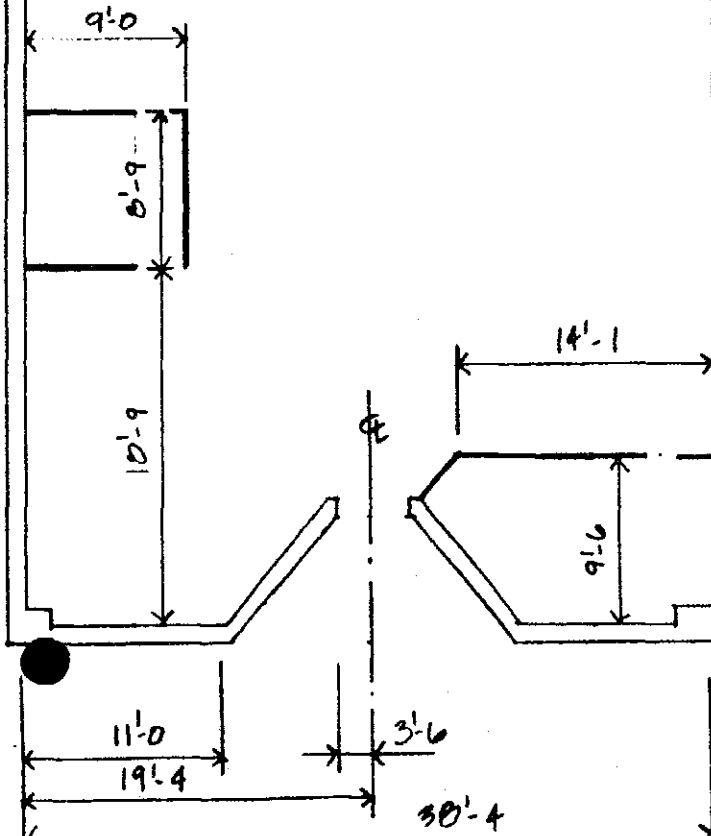
402-408 Monroe Street - Third Floor



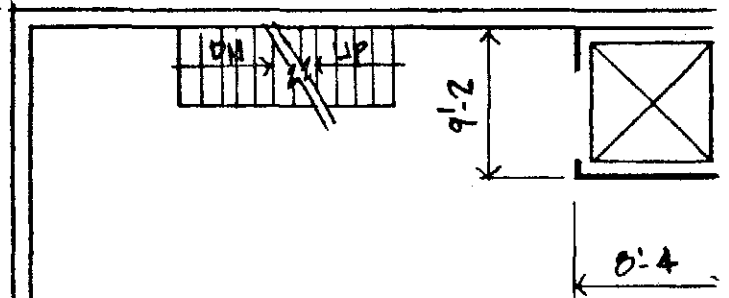
109-111 N. St. Clair Street



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



77'-4"



TYPICAL 2ND & 3RD FLOOR PLAN

30'-4"